

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 050304

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FOL REPEAT OF NEW DELHI 3169 TO SECSTATE INFO DACCA ISLAMABAD
KABUL BOMBAY CALCUTTA MADRAS MAR 06

QTE:

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 3169

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, IN, PK, US

SUBJECT: REACTION TO LIFTING ARMS EMBARGO LOSING STEAM

REF: NEW DELHI 2853

SUMMARY: PUBLIC REACTION TO THE U.S. ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE
LIFTING OF THE ARMS EMBARGO HAS LOST STEAM. THE GOVERNMENT
OF INDIA PUBLIC RESPONSE WAS ON THE WHOLE RESTRAINED, AND WE
BELIEVE THE PRIME MINISTER HERSELF DECIDED NOT TO
EXCERBATE THE ISSUE ALTHOUGH SHE AND OTHER GOI LEADERS
REMAIN PRIVATELY CONCERNED. PUBLIC REACTION WAS ON BALANCE
MILD. THE ONLY SUBSTANTIAL DEMONSTRATION THUS FAR WAS IN
CALCUTTA. DEFENSE AND FOREIGN POLICY CRITICS FOR THE MOST
PART ARGUED FOR TEMPERATE REACTION, AND BARRING A CONTRARY
LEAD FROM THE GOI, THAT IS THE WAY IT HAS GONE. FUTURE
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PAGE 02 STATE 050304

ARMS SALES TO PAKISTAN WILL CALL FORTH REACTIONS IN

PROPORTION TO THE DANGERS INDIA PERCEIVES IN EACH SALE.
END SUMMARY.

1. INDIAN PUBLIC REACTION TO THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE LIFTING OF THE U.S. ARMS EMBARGO, WHICH ALMOST ALL INDIANS REGARD AS AN ANNOUNCEMENT OF U.S. ARMS FOR PAKISTAN, HAS LOST STEAM. THE GOI PUBLIC RESPONSE HAS ON THE WHOLE BEEN RESTRAINED AND WE HAVE SEEN SEVERAL SIGNS THIS STEMMED FROM THE PRIME MINISTER HERSELF. WE UNDERSTAND SHE REFUSED TO ISSUE A STATEMENT TO THE "NATIONAL SEMINAR" HELD IN PARLIAMENT LAST WEEK AND SAT SILENT OR DID NOT ATTEND CONGRESS PARLIAMENTARY PARTY SESSIONS ON THE SUBJECT. MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS CHAVAN ALSO DECLINED TO BE DRAWN INTO FURTHER COMMENT AT THE CONGRESS PARLIAMENTARY PARTY MEETING ON ARMS POLICY MARCH 4, NOTING HE HAD ALREADY CONVEYED THE GOVERNMENT'S REACTION LAST WEEK. NOR DID DEFENSE MINISTER SWARAN SINGH ADD TO THE FIRE AT THESE SESSIONS. THERE HAVE BEEN NO DIRECTIVES TO CUT DOWN ON CONTACTS WITH OFFICIAL AMERICANS OR TO PROCEED ESSENTIALLY ON ANYTHING BUT A "BUSINESS AS ALMOST USUAL" BASIS.

2. THE U.S. DECISION HAS, NEVERTHELESS, INCREASED THE CONCERN OF THE PM AND OTHER GOI LEADERS ABOUT U.S. POLICY AND THEY WILL BE VERY SENSITIVE TO U.S. (AND PAKISTANI) ACTIONS IN THE COMING MONTHS, PARTICULARLY SO FAR AS SPECIFIC ARMS SALES ARE CONCERNED AND PAKISTAN'S ATTITUDE TOWARD RESOLVING OUTSTANDING INDO-PAK ISSUES. BHUTTO'S LETTER TO MRS. GANDHI MAY HAVE HELPED SIGNIFICANTLY (ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NOT HEARD ANY SPECIFIC INDIAN COMMENTS ON THIS).

3. THERE WERE SOME STRONG ATTACKS ON THE U.S. DECISION IN THE CONGRESS PARLIAMENTARY PARTY EXECUTIVE ON MARCH 4 BY READILY IDENTIFIABLE CRITICS OF THE U.S., MOSTLY ON THE "LEFT" OR STRONGLY ASSOCIATED WITH "ANTI-PAKISTAN" SENTIMENTS. CONGRESS MPS WITH WHOM WE HAVE BEEN IN CONTACT OVER THE PAST WEEK HAVE BEEN REMARKABLY RELUCTANT TO RAISE THE SUBJECT IN INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS AND THERE HAVE BEEN NO NEW DEMANDS FOR A PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE. THE JANA SANGH NATIONAL CONFERENCE, MEETING IN NEW DELHI
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PAGE 03 STATE 050304

ON MARCH 5, EXPRESSED ITS GRAVE CONCERN OVER THE U.S. DECISION TO "REARM PAKISTAN," AND IN THE SAME RESOLUTION STRESSED INDIAN SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN ARMS TO ELIMINATE DEPENDENCE ON OTHERS. THE OTHER PARTIES HAVE NOT ISSUED FORMAL DECLARATIONS.

4. A SERIES OF SEMINARS ON RADIO OR IN PUBLIC FORUMS GENERALLY VOICED AGREEMENT THAT THE U.S. DECISION,

WHILE REGRETTABLE, NEED NOT UNDULY EXCITE INDIA AT THIS TIME. THE ENTIRE SUBJECT FADED OFF THE FRONT PAGES AND VIRTUALLY OUT OF THE PRESS ALTOGETHER BY THIS WEEK.

5. THERE WERE NO ATTEMPTS AT A DEMONSTRATION ON AMBASSADOR SAXBE'S ARRIVAL ON THE EVENING OF MARCH 2. INDEED, IN NEW DELHI THERE HAVE BEEN NO DEMONSTRATIONS AT ALL SINCE THE FORMAL ANNOUNCEMENT, ALTHOUGH THERE WAS A SMALL ONE BEFORE THE EMBASSY ON FEBRUARY 20, SEE NEW DELHI 2404.

6. REACTION IN THE OTHER MAJOR METROPOLITAN AREAS WITH THE POSSIBLE EXCEPTION OF CALCUTTA HAS BEEN GENERALLY SIMILAR TO THAT IN NEW DELHI WITH INDIANS EITHER NOT MENTIONING THE SUBJECT AT ALL, OR IF THEY DO, RAISING IT WITHOUT MUCH HEAT. IN MADRAS A SCHEDULED CPI DEMONSTRATION AT THE CONSULATE FAILED TO MATERIALIZE. IN CALCUTTA ONE DEMONSTRATION LAST WEEKEND WAS QUITE VIGOROUS, A GROUP OF 350 TO 400 TORE DOWN THE AMERICAN FLAG IN FRONT OF THE USIS BUILDING, SUBSTITUTED THE CONGRESS BANNER, AND FINALLY REPLACED THE U.S. FLAG AT THE END OF THE DEMONSTRATION. SOME OF THIS GROUP REPORTEDLY THREATENED OUR INDIAN EMPLOYEES. WE HAVE LEFT AN AIDE MEMOIRE WITH MEA HERE AND THE CONGEN HAS APPROACHED THE WEST BENGAL AUTHORITIES SEEKING REASSURANCES OF APPROPRIATE PROTECTION.

7. WE HAVE ONE REPORT FROM A MEMBER OF A WORLD BANK TEAM, HERE AT THE FINANCE MINISTER'S INVITATION, THAT INTEREST IN THE RESOURCES SURVEY THE TEAM WAS IN INDIA TO CONDUCT HAS DECLINED DUE TO A GOI DECISION TO PUT MORE MONEY INTO ITS DEFENSE BUDGET FOLLOWING THE U.S. ANNOUNCEMENT. WE SHALL INQUIRE INTO THIS REPORT AS WELL, BUT CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 04 STATE 050304

FIND IT DOES NOT FIT THE GENERAL PICTURE WE ARE GETTING AT THIS TIME. THE DEFENSE BUDGET ITSELF, RELEASED LAST WEEK, WAS 5 PERCENT HIGHER THAN LAST YEAR'S ACTUAL EXPENDITURES.

8. WHILE PUBLIC AND OFFICIAL REACTIONS ARE MUTED, EACH ARMS SALE TO PAKISTAN WILL ELICIT SOME NEW OFFICIAL AND GENERAL RESPONSE WHICH WILL VARY IN PROPORTION TO HOW DISADVANTAGEOUS THE INDIANS VIEW THE SALE TO BE TO THEM, WHAT THE STATE OF INDO-U.S. RELATIONS IS ON THE ISSUES, AS WELL AS A VARIETY OF AMBIENT FACTORS. SAXBE
UNQTE INGERSOLL

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